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The Island of Anticosti



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THE ISLAND OF ANTICOSTI,

Its Geographical Position, Extent, Resources, &c., &c.

Extracts from Reports of Arthur Rankin, Esq., A. R. Roche, Esq.,
and James Richardson, Esq.

The Island of Anticosti is situated in the River and Gulf of St. Lawrence, about five hundred miles below Quebec, and consequently that much nearer England. It is nearly one hundred and forty miles long and its greatest breadth is thirty five miles, gradually becoming narrower as it extends East and West. It contains more than three thousand square miles, or about two million acres, and for curing his provisions upwards of a million acres is composed of soil of the very best quality for agricultural purposes. The language used is "It is on such rocks, in such a condition, and with such an altitude, that the best soils of the Western Peninsula of Canada West are placed, as well as of the Genesee County in the State of New-York. I have seen nothing in the actual soil, as it exists to induce me to suppose that, in so far as soil is considered, Anticosti will be anything inferior to those regions."

The island contains extensive quarries of excellent stone for building purposes, deposits of marble of very superior quality besides stone fit for lithographic purposes.

The fisheries in its rivers and surrounding its coast are extremely valuable, and in the interior it contains extensive forests of most valuable timber. It also has large deposits of peat of excellent quality, exceeding one hundred and thirty thousand acres in extent.

According to the best authorities in the United States, an acre of peat, three feet in depth, will contain from three thousand three hundred to three thousand six hundred tons; six feet in depth, from six thousand six hundred to seven thousand two hundred; ten feet, from eleven to twelve thousand tons. Assuming the peat deposits of Anticosti to average six feet in depth, which will be found to be far below the mark, and estimating the material, in its crude state, to be worth one penny per ton, the result would be six thousand six hundred pence, hundred and fifty shillings, or twenty-seven pounds ten shillings per acre; and computing the extent of the peat beds at one hundred and twenty five thousand acres, the value of the peat alone would amount to no less than three millions four hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred pounds sterling.

At a comparatively insignificant expenditure, two excellent harbours, capable of accommodating the largest class of sea-going ships and steamers, can be established upon the island—one at Ellis Bay, near the upper, the other at Fox Bay near the lower end. While beside these there

are several other places of draught. The established steamers must pass but a mile out of their channel of coal required to carry them to Montreal each ship than she can take her to Montreal each vessel could thus .

Montreal, each season would still add upwards of £4000 to the earnings of each ship within the year ; and to a line such as that of the Montreal Ocean Steamship Company, with its nine or ten steamers, the advantages to be derived from the establishment of a safe stopping place at Anticosti would be something enormous. As to the supply of coal it could either be taken from England, or brought from New-Brunswick within a single day's sail, if, indeed upon an exploration of the interior coal is not found to exist upon the island itself. Then as to the fisheries surrounding the island, and in its Rivers, they are among the richest in the world.

The excellent position of the island in regard to ships, commerce, &c., becomes at once apparent when we consider that every vessel must take either of the channels formed by Anticosti upon entering or leaving the river, whether having passed from the Atlantic or intending to pass to the ocean, through the straits of Belle Isle through the more frequented passage between Newfoundland and Cape Breton, or through the Gut of Canso, or whether running between Quebec and those portions of Canada and of the Lower Provinces lying upon the Gulf of St. Lawrence. On taking either of channels formed by Anticosti, vessels pass close to the island in consequence of the moderate breadth of the northern one, and of the strong south-east current which always runs along the southern channel, to avoid which, and the risk of being driven upon the truly dangerous coast of the south shore of the gulf and river, where, for several hundred miles, there is no harbor or place of shelter for any craft larger than a schooner, and were for long distances, there is not one foot of beach outside the perpendicular cliffs to land upon, vessels generally stand out till they make the West Point of Anticosti, close to which is situated the convenient harbor Ellis Bay, occupying a spot nearly mid distance between the northern and southern banks of the St. Lawrence and of easy access from both channels of the river. Considering that about two thousand vessels from Europe alone will have made this point in the course of the present season, some slight idea may be conceived of the capabilities of position attached to the island and in particular to Ellis Bay. The inner anchorage of this bay has a depth of from three to four fathoms at low water with excellent holding ground (gravel and mud,) is of as large capacity as the harbour of Montreal, and has been found, by experience, to afford perfect shelter, in all winds, to vessels of upwards of 100 tons ; while the outer position of the anchorage could be materially improved at a trifling expense, so as to be able to contain in safety, during all winds, almost any number of vessels of the larger size. Docks, with a patent slip, &c., could also be easily constructed there, which would be admirably situated for the repair of vessels stranded or receiving other damage throughout the Lower St. Lawrence most of them becoming both up by the action of the sea, and, in some cases, dismantled by wreckers, before they can obtain assistance from Quebec, or the intelligence of their condition can be conveyed there, which port, strange to say, is the only place from the Atlantic to Montreal (a distance of upwards of eight hundred miles, where vessels can be properly over-hauled or be supplied with the commonest stores, such as anchors, chains, sails, &c. For steam tugs, employed for the relief of vessels in distress, Ellis Bay might also be made an excellent station with the facilities there for procuring shelter for our shipping in a portion of the St. Lawrence, where a spacious and deep harbour is more wanted than in any other part of the river or gulf, it is astonishing that no attention has yet been directed to that spot. This neglect, however cannot long continue. It could be made not

only a fine commercial harbor, but also an excellent spot for commanding, with a few steam vessels and for sending out cruisers up the latter, or to any p

The island on the south side generally rises from (but at the entrance of Observation River it is between) to the centre where a range of moderate sized hills approach the north side to terminate in steep cliff! It is mostly covered near the shore (like those upon a great part of the coast) which become gradually larger as they approach the island, of the wind and sea. This is very remarkable upon so small an island, for they are very small, and gradually increase in size from each side to the centre those nearest the sea being sometimes quite white in appearance, from the salt which is thrown, and crystallises upon them. The trees are spruce, fir, red and white birch ash, quantities of very fine tamarack and upon the north side of the island, some good sized pine.

With the tamarack and pine growing there and the immense quantities of valuable timber drifted upon the island from Quebec and other places after easterly gale many ships might be built every year. Like the valuable meadows for cattle and sheep, which have recently been discovered in Minnesota, in the Far West there are here many very fine natural meadows, producing rich grasses five and six feet high, and in some parts there are alternate ranges of wood and open plain. On the south side of the island there, are several Peat bogs of some extent, and some salt marshes, caused by the overflowing of the sea at certain periods which must tend to fertilize rather than to impoverish the land; and near the south-west point there are some large salt ponds, which were labour plentiful there, might be turned to account in the manufacture of salt a manufacture which would become of some value to a great part of our North American fisheries, which as well as the whole of Canada, are now supplied with salt from England or the United States; and for curing fish and provisions, bay salt formed from the sea and from salt ponds is the most valuable. II consequence of their not having been a sufficient supply of salt upon the Island, an immense quantity of fish caught at Anticosti last year had to be thrown away; and during the present season, the fishermen at Aitchat, Cape Breton, were forced to sell mackerel at from six pence to ten pence a hundred or to see them rot upon the beach through not having enough salt to care them with. This latter circumstance occurred at a time when mackerel was selling at Boston for nineteen dollars a barrel. Some of the Bahama islands are retained merely on account of the salt ponds whish they contain, and at Ceylon a large revenue is derived from the salt works carried on in that island.

It is now time to notice thoses ressources belonging to Anticosti, which, being wholly independent of soil and climate may be turned to immediate account. These ressources principally consist of its *sea and river fisheries*, which although comparatively neglected by Canada, may be classed among the most valuable fisheries of British North America.

In the recent report, published by the New-Brunswick Government upon the fisheries that province, mention is made of the valuable whale and cod fisheries existing upon the coasts of Anticosti; and it is stated that the Jersey-Houses fit out vessels so carry on the former upon both sides of the island and up the St. Lawrence as far as Bic, some of the Whales (hump backs) being seventy feet long, and yielding eight tons of oil; while the fishermen of Graspé frequently resort to the east end of the island, and take cod in great abundance.

In his work entitled Newfoundland in 1842, Sir Richard Bonnycastle states, that the whale fishing is pursued along the coast of Labrador in and though the straits of Belleisle (close to Anticosti), and that whales of all sizes are taken, from the smallest finner to the largest mysticetus or great common oil whale of the Northern Ocean which occasionally visits these regions. It thus

in the most convenient and e two entrances of the river,

o sixty feet above the beach (at high,) and is nearly level entire length, and upon the thick forest of trees, stunted and of other countries,) but less exposed to the influence where at the exposed points

appears by these authorities, that on every side of Anticosti valuable whales abound, the pursuit of which, and seals and cod, it is not improbable, could be carried on in winter as well as in summer were the attempt to be properly made; but without a trial the undertaking may ever remain unjustly condemned as impossible. Should such an attempt be successful, it would not be the first instance of that being accomplished upon trial, which theory, timidity and prejudice had long declared to be impracticable. Here, again, the experience of our northern fishermen and of the Esquimaux, who fearlessly encounter all difficulties and dangers of the ice and of the weather and whofish in winter and summer, might be successfully brought to bear.

" Of cod. M. Corbet, in his statement made to the writer remarks that one boat with two good fishermen, could take off south-west Point or at Fox Bay, eighteen hundred of these fish in one day; while Mr. Morrison states that cod, halibut, and a variety of other fish could be caught all round the island and in incalculable quantities, and that no finer cod is caught on any part of the coast of America or on the banks of Newfoundland than is to be met with there. To this may be added the testimony, of Captain Fair R. N., of H. M. ship companion, who states that he met a few shallops from the Magdalen Islands at the east end of Anticosti where they found cod in great abundance and of excellent quality.

" Of hardly less value than the former is the seal fishery, which could certainly be carried on in winter as well as in summer, many seals being seen on the ice during the former season and in the spring, and thousands of them being observed during the summer and autumn, at the entrances of all the bays and rivers, where they remain almost entirely unmolested. To show the value of this fishery in the Gulf, the New Brunswick official report, already cited, brings forward an instance of a schooner engaged in it from Sydney, Cape Breton, having cleared £14,000 within three weeks of her having left that port. Yet at Anticosti, where seals abound more than in most parts of the gulf, this fishery is at present almost neglected; the Americans and others who resort to its neighbourhood, being principally engrossed with the still more profitable cod and mackerel fisheries. For the storing and preservation of seal, whale and cod oil the temperate degree of heat at Anticosti during the summer is particularly favourable.

" At the present moment the mackerel fishery is the most lucrative one in the St. Lawrence, and is the most extensively pursued; mackerel is now selling at Boston for nineteen dollars a barrel and at Halifax and Quebec for a few dollars less than that sum. No part of the Gulf abounds with this fish more than the neighbourhood of Anticosti. Many schooners visit the coasts of the latter from the United States, the Lower Provinces, and a few from Gaspé, to carry on this fishery, in which they are very successful, and M. Corbet states that the mackerel he has seen in July and August come in shoals so thick and so close to the shore that as many as one hundred barrels could be taken in one haul of the net. A few hours work will thus sometimes pay the whole expenses of a schooner during the season.

" Herrings as fine as any in the world are as plentiful about the island as mackerel; but from the wretched manner in which they are cured, they obtain a much less price in the market, and are, therefore, comparatively neglected by the fishermen. To make this fishery as valuable as the former, a few of the Dutch North sea fishermen should be engaged, who would introduce their mode of curing this fish which has long obtained for Dutch herrings the highest price in every market in Europe. By adopting that mode the scotch fishermen are beginning to compete successfully with the former.

" At the entrance of all the rivers and creeks immense quantities of lobsters are thrown up by the sea; the collection of which, and the preserving them on the spot for distant markets, or sending them fresh in vessels containing wells to our home markets might render this fishery a very profitable one. Eels are also very numerous and very fine, and are often collected by parties

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able to expensively fitted out schooners (of from 40 to 150 tons), some of which come a distance
of fifteen hundred miles, and have to bring every supply, including provisions and salt, with
them, how much more profitable would they become to parties residing upon the island, who
would have their supplies upon the spot, and who would carry on their operations in boats ?
How important also to the latter would become the trade which might be created with the former,
the supplying them with provisions, often with fishing gear, and with every description of marine
stores ; and how soon would such a trade lead to more extensive transactions, in regard to the
purchase of fish upon the spot, and the disposal of it in the best markets, and to a further trade
in West India, South American, and Mediterranean produce, obtained in exchange for fish, and
being in great demand in Canada ? It might also lead to the ~~island~~, of good-sized villages, and
ultimately of towns. Many large towns in various parts of the world, which are now places of
great wealth, have risen from elements quite as slight as these.

" Though all the rivers of Anticosti abound with the finest salmon, few of them are fished to
any extent, in consequence of there being but a small number of persons residing upon the
island and those who come there not being prepared, and not having the right to fish in the
rivers, which, with sufficient attention and judicious management, might be made almost as va
luable as the best salmon rivers in Scotland, for each of which a rent is obtained of from five to
fifteen thousand pounds sterling per annum.

" With so many other resources, it is of little consequence whether or not Anticosti shall be
found to possess valuable minerals. There is no account of its ever having been visited by a geolo
gist ; but iron ore of great richness and quartz are frequently met with on the island, and recently
some substances have been discovered resembling mineral paints. Plumbago may also exist there,
as it has been found among limestone of a similar character to that of the island upon several
parts of this continent, and Mr. M. Ewan mentions having found ~~the~~ stone there, some of it as
fine as water of Ayr-stone, and some as coarse as grindstone. The fossiliferous limestone, which
exists in great quantities upon the shores in that horizontal strata, is of so fine a grain and colour,
and so hard, that it is most reservedly classed under the head of marble.

Were this marble quarried to any extent, large profits could be made by disposing of it to
builders in the chief towns of the province, whose wealthy inhabitants are beginning to vie with
each other in the beauty of their residences and the style of their living. To Quebec and Montreal
it could easily be conveyed as ballast. Being very durable, as well as very beautiful there is little
doubt that were it brought to those cities in any quantities, it would be selected for many
public buildings. Both Lieutenant Baddeley, R. E., who touched at several parts of the island in
1831 and Sir Richard Bonnycastle, R. E.; who landed at the entrance of Jupiter river in 1811,
speak of the value of this marble.

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clared that, at an expense of £2000 he could build a breakwater upon the reefs running out from the point, which would render the bay a secure shelter in all winds for the largest vessels. A harbour could also probably be made at Salt Lake Bay, about eight miles further to the east.

"A specimen of the marble brought from the island obtained the first prize at the recent Provincial Exhibition held at Quebec.

"With regard to the capabilities of the island, there might be a colonization company, a fishing company, and a commercial company; the first purchasing the whole island, and selling or leasing to the others those portions of the coast at which the operations of the latter could be most conveniently carried on."

Pine was observed in the valley of the Salmon River, about four miles inland, where ten or twelve trees that were measured gave from twelve to twenty inches in diameter at the base, with heights varying from sixty to eighty feet. White and yellow birch are common in sizes from a few inches to two feet in diameter at the base, and from twenty to fifty feet high. Balsam was seen, but it was small and not abundant. Tamarac was observed, but it was likewise small and scarce. One of our men, however, who is a hunter on the island, informed he had seen groves of this timber north from Ellis or Gamache Bay, of which some of the trees were three feet in diameter, and over a hundred feet in height. Poplar was met with in groves, close to the beach on the north side of the island.

"Drift timber.—The quantity of squared timber and saw-logs which are scattered along the south shore of the island is very surprising; the abundance appears to be greater towards the east end than the west; but according to the calculation which I have made, if the whole of the logs were placed end to end they would form a line to the whole length of the island, or 140 miles; this would give about one million of cubic feet. Some of the squared timber may have been derived from wrecks, but the great number of saw-logs, which are not shipped as cargo, induces me to suppose that the main source of this timber is drift.

The proprietors can give an absolute title, *in fee*, for the whole island.

Quebec, 6th April 1870.

✓ Hobson Mackellar & Henry
land for a whaler, seal, cod, & fishing station
= a harbour of refuge.
= an extensive marine store depot.
= pasturage & some agriculture in interior.
// Marsh for building.
// Drift timber for boat building
=
Quarry would Hon. P. Mitchell
spend £2000 for a harbour of
Refuge?

of the
prior.

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ANTICOSTI.

Its Geographical position, ressources, &c.

John H. Walker

A prominent voice
and a leading writer

G. E. Lyle

Archibald Macdonald